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COMMITTEE ON INFORMATION
Eighteenth session
6-17 May 1996

ACTIVITIES OF THE JOINT UNITED NATIONS INFORMATION COMMITTEE

Report of the Secretariat of the Joint United Nations Information Committee

1. The Joint United Nations Information Committee held its twenty-first session in Paris at the headquarters of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) from 6 to 8 July 1995, under the chairmanship of Ms. Mehr Khan, Director of Information of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). Directors of information and officials of 23 United Nations bodies, including specialized agencies and related organizations, attended the session. The report on the session was presented to the Administrative Committee on Coordination (ACC). The Committee considered a variety of matters relating to inter-agency cooperation in the field of public information. Below is a brief summary of the discussion, as well as an account of follow-up action on decisions taken at the session on issues of interest to the members of the Committee on Information:

(a) The Joint United Nations Information Committee held extensive consultations on joint information programmes relating to the cycle of major United Nations conferences, including the World Summit for Social Development, the Fourth World Conference on Women and the Second United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II). On the follow-up to the World Summit, the Department of Public Information proposed to link joint information activities, to the extent possible, to the observance of the International Year for the Eradication of Poverty (1996), a major component of the Summit's follow-up. At the request of the Committee, the Department established a task force composed of New York representatives of Committee members, to coordinate the unified approach to this issue. With regard to the upcoming Habitat II Conference, the Department and the United Nations Centre on Human Settlements (UNCHS) presented for consideration by the Committee a joint public information strategy. In addition, several members pointed out that the 1995-1996 observances of a number of international days adopted by the General Assembly would link those

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observances to the theme of the Conference. Following the Committee's session, the Department and UNCHS established a task force composed of New York-based representatives of member organizations to coordinate system-wide information activities for this event;

(b) The Joint United Nations Information Committee also discussed the possible participation of the United Nations system in the upcoming international expositions scheduled to take place at Lisbon in 1998 and at Hanover, Germany in the year 2000. Representatives of the organizing committees for both events made presentations to the Committee. With respect to the Lisbon Expo, organized under the theme "The oceans, a heritage for the future", and scheduled to take place during the International Year for the Oceans, ACC subsequently decided that the United Nations and UNESCO jointly should act as lead agencies for the preparation of system-wide participation in this event in accordance with the 1992 ACC guidelines for the participation of the United Nations system in international expositions and the 1994 addendum thereon, which stipulate that such participation can take place only with no cost to the Organization. Accordingly, the United Nations and UNESCO have initiated the preparatory work, in coordination with other interested members of the Committee, with a view to both reaching the necessary agreements with the host Government, and preparing an effective presentation on the wide variety of activities of the United Nations system in that important area. The Committee decided to postpone a decision on the Hanover Expo until such time when additional information on the event became available;

(c) The Joint United Nations Information Committee also held extensive discussions on a system-wide publication on development issues that could replace Development Forum, which ceased publication at the end of 1992 owing to a lack of sufficient funding both from the regular budget and from the extrabudgetary sources. At the request of the Committee, the Department of Public Information had prepared a report outlining three possible proposals in that regard, namely: (i) continuation of Development Update, a bimonthly newsletter for information on issues before the ongoing cycle of major United Nations conferences; (ii) revival of the World Newspaper Supplement, which had several years ago been reproduced in major newspapers; and (iii) development of a new system-wide publication on development issues. All members of the Committee agreed that the first two options would not fulfil the objective at hand and a number of them agreed to look into the feasibility of starting a new system-wide publication, despite considerable concern regarding its cost and professional quality. The Committee requested the Department to prepare a comprehensive proposal on the issue, taking into account the views of the members and covering all issues concerned. Following the session, the Department continued the dialogue with Committee members, but it became clear that, unless current stringent resource constraints changed for the better, neither the Department nor any other Committee members were in a position to commit resources in their budgets for that purpose. In the meantime, the Department would keep the matter under review;

(d) The Joint United Nations Information Committee endorsed the thrust and content of the programme of work of the Non-Governmental Liaison Service in strengthening cooperation and dialogue between the United Nations and non-governmental organizations. It welcomed the increased support for the

Service from within the United Nations system, urged the 16 sponsoring organizations to maintain current levels of support over the biennium 1996-1997 and invited other members to join in as sponsors;

(e) At the recommendation of the Joint United Nations Information Committee, ACC endorsed the appointment of Mr. Samir Sanbar, Assistant Secretary-General for Public Information, as Chairman of the Committee for a two-year term (1996-1997).

2. The twenty-second session of the Joint United Nations Information Committee is scheduled to take place in the first week of July 1996.